

Covert Operations in Vietnam: The Secret War Against Hanoi

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DECEMBER 9, 1999 | Professor Schultz talked about his book *The Secret War Against Hanoi: Kennedy and Johnson's Use of Spies, Saboteurs, and Covert Warriors in North Vietnam*, published by Harper Collins. Professor Schultz was a member of the covert operations team, the "Studies and Observation Group" from 1964 to 1972 during the Vietnam War. The book describes psychological operations, commando raids, espionage, and deception operations. He specifically talked about President Kennedy taking the covert actions projects away from the CIA and turning them over to the Studies Observation Group.

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four eight nine eight now history on book TV looks at US operations in North Vietnam during the Vietnam War the secret war against Hanoi relies on recently Declassified top-secret pentagon documents and over sixty interviews with key officers author Richard Schultz is an expert in the Pentagon studies an observation group which oversaw the activities in Southeast Asia from 1964 to 1972 he was at Fort McNair in Washington DC for this 70 minute discussion good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to this the first event in our 1999-2000 series of lectures by authors of new books in the field of strategy and defense policy I'm Bob Solano director of publications and editor of joint force quarterly here at ndu this series is presented by the Institute for national strategic studies with the kind support of NGO Foundation and is intended to expose faculty staff and students as well as colleagues and friends from about town to the background of works of interest to devote a Strategic Studies defense analysis and military affairs in the words of the author's themselves I'm very pleased tonight to introduce this program for three reasons one it marks the real alteration of this lecture series which after a lapse of almost a year and the subject of this book had hand is something which has interested me since my involvement in Vietnam in the 1970s and earlier at Fort Bragg and the identity of the author himself who is an old friend and colleague the subject of special operations in Vietnam has received scant attention literature on the war other than well chronicled exploits of the 5th Special Forces Group among the Martin yards or c'mere chrome along the Cambodian border accounts of the unsuccessful raid to rescue American POWs at Sante in North Vietnam and some efforts to analyze the effectiveness of

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efforts to analyze the effectiveness of black gray and white propaganda aimed at the Vietcong and regular North Vietnamese forces there are really few if any references to the subject of this studies and observation group of the US military assistance command or max SOG in the literature on Vietnam the secret war against Hanoi therefore is an important contribution to the history not only the Vietnam War but also to the theory and application of those instruments of national power which we group under the rubric of special operations it is a book that could not have been written without the cooperation of many former members of Max SOG their current day successes at US Army Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg and the unique qualifications of its author Richard H Schultz his director of the International Security Studies Program an associate professor of international politics at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy he's also taught

here at in Washington at Catholic University held visiting academic appointments at both the Naval War College and the US Military Academy he's received grants research fellowships from Mohammed Stanford and the u.s. Institute of Peace dick is written and lectured widely on terrorism intelligence revolutionary warfare and allied subjects but with the topic of his doctoral dissertation on US counterinsurgency strategy in Vietnam that drew us together in 1982 when we were colleagues at the national strategy information center it was then we began many conversations on SIOP pole war and Special Operations and it's delight for me to welcome dick back tonight to talk about the successes and failures of Mex aughh and in part what those tell us about the use of Special Operations today well it's um it's really a delight to be here I want to first thank Bob Solano for inviting me and also say that

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for inviting me and also say that commend him actually for the wonderful work he's doing with Joint Forces quarterly and with the publication series here at ndu it's its first class and a good job am i all so it's wonderful to see um some friends and I see several friends here I see some of my former students and it's really a special night also for me because I have my my dear sweet niece here so it it's great to be here what I want to do is first say something about what why I think the book is unique all authors like to do this you know we write books and we tell you they're unique I think that what is unique about this book and it would have been unique whoever wrote it is that it allows us to look into a secret world it's a fact that since OSS in world war ii to the present the US government has attempted to use special operations and covert operations to support foreign policy but but much of that is secret and it should be it took place within the context of the Cold War but when the Cold War ended there's an opportunity to start to open up those vaults and to take a look at the successes and failures and to determine what is that we can learn from those successes and failures and I think there are things to learn from it now try to address that later on I was lucky I found a three-star general Terry Scott who is the head of Special Operations Command and we spent a long time talking about the need to do such a study and one of the things that that stimulated him to support it was the fact that that he felt his own command and no much about what saag had had

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much about what saag had had accomplished and over a significant period of time so my book is about the studies and observation group an oculus name sounds like a bunch of academics doing studies but in fact saw as it was called I believe is the largest covert paramilitary operation conducted by the US and the Cold War if you measure that by the complexities and the operations involved the time they ran it not spending money and that would be Afghanistan but but one of these other indicators now the story of SOG let me set if you will a bit the context and and the context for SOG really predates saw get lies with the Kennedy administration and the story begins and I wrote this as a story not not as a an academic speak or policy wonks speak but but as a story I had great characters to to build that story around but the way young SOG came about was in 1961 the origins of it why in Kennedy's first National Security Council meeting you know Eisenhower had told him keep your eye on Laos and he came in and and in his first briefing told him he needed to keep his eye on Vietnam the briefing was conducted by general ed Lansdale an Lansdale who had just been back from Vietnam told Kennedy that things aren't going well the Vietcong they're closing in and the North Vietnamese are are providing a lot of support for them Kennedy at one point in the meeting turned to Allen Dulles who was the head of the CIA and he said are we doing the same stuff to them up north we have guerrillas operating in

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north we have guerrillas operating in the north and and Dulles gave them a very unsatisfactory answer and and Kennedy said well I want guerrilla operate up north and really that's the beginning of this large covert operation Kennedy became disillusioned with the CIA felt they weren't moving fast enough and at the end of 62 he decided to turn it over to the military and and so that's the story that I'll talk a bit about tonight the turning it over to the military and and how that operation was developed and right um I should say something

more about the evidence the evidence for this book is based on documents that probably were never supposed to see the light of day they were highly classified very pretty deep and I was fortunate enough to convince general Scott to open that archive to me but also general Scott did something else that was quite helpful um he he gave me an introduction to the men who ran SOG to the people who ran the different operational components of SOG and so I had probably between three and four thousand pages of documents and and I interviewed 60 of the people who ran each of SOGs four operational divisions and the way to understand SOG and then the way I approached it was from an operational point of view I wanted to know what is that they were trying to do and why what is it they were trying to do they had four operational components

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do they had four operational components the first dealt with the insertion and running of agents and then later the creation of a complex deception or double triple cross operation that included some pretty rough stuff such as manipulating North Vietnamese POWs the second division of SOG dealt with psychological warfare and that included trying to establish a fact fabricated resistance organization in North Vietnam kidnapping and indoctrinating North Vietnamese citizens operating falsely attributed black radio stations distributing propaganda material forging letters and documents sometimes called blackmail and initiating a some other dirty tricks and dirty tricks was part of it the third operational division of SOG dealt with covert maritime operations against the North Vietnamese Coast this included capture and destruction of North Vietnamese naval fishing boats and also crossed beach commando sabotage raids and the insertion of PSYWAR material and then finally the fourth operational division of SOG focused on the Ho Chi Minh Trail cross-border operations against the trail to disrupt the movement of North Vietnamese supplies and troops by identifying targets and calling in airstrikes so these are the four operational divisions of SOG and these four operational divisions focused on two of what Klaus would call centers of gravity I would call them strategic pressure points and and what do I mean by a strategic pressure point it's it's

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by a strategic pressure point it's it's one of those aspects of the enemy that if you affect it and you throw them off balance you you make it more difficult for them to accomplish their objectives and SOG focused on two one was the rear area of North Vietnam and what they wanted to do plain and simple was make the North Vietnamese believe that they had a real internal security problem they had a subversion problem and and they needed to devote resources to deal with that and and and and of course as all of you know in wartime if your rear area is uncertain it creates a lot of tension and problems for you affect it and you can affect your enemy's capacity to conduct war doesn't mean you'll win the war them but you can throw them off balance and and saw game did that and then secondly saw gained at the Ho Chi Minh Trail the Ho Chi Minh Trail strategically important to the North Vietnamese in fact in the book my recount how in the early 90s people started the Americans started to travel back to Vietnam to talk to the Vietnamese and to do business or whatever and one such person was a fellow from Minnesota who was a peace activist and he he met up with this North Vietnamese Colonel not an ordinary colonel the fellow who was given the honor of taking the surrender at in 1975 in South Vietnam and and this activist said to the colonel you know was there anything we could have done to prevent your victory sure that the answer was no and the colonel looked them in the eye and said cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail and

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and said cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail and then elaborated on it so focusing on the trail was a strategic pressure point and and and so SOG to understand SOG we need to understand it in terms of what it at attempted to do now what I'd like to do is to talk about some of the the key revelations some of the things that that I I found out in my research and and to highlight those and and I would begin with the fact that it's it's so interesting that the Kennedy from the very early days of his administration embraced the use of covert action to subvert Hanoi and convinced it to stop fomenting war in the south and he stayed with that idea on may I am IANA

how he came to it but it made strategic sense and and Kennedy believed that all right if if they're doing this in the south we need to throw them off balance by doing it to them in the north and and and Kennedy some of Kennedy senior advisors signed up for this too when you won't be surprised to hear that McGeorge Bundy did and that Walt Rostow Trost out did and uh and Bobby Kennedy but slated McNamara and McNamara actually was Kennedy's action officer for taking the covert war away from the CIA and getting the Pentagon to step up to it and and it's in the documents I mean it's clear in the documents that he did this in fact in 1963 this was the period of the transfer in the Pentagon the Chairman had Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time Maxwell Taylor kept trying to pass it back to the CIA and and and McNamara

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back to the CIA and and and McNamara would cut him off and and say no this is you're going to do it and this is going to be in the hands of the military the Kennedy administration quickly became disenchanted by the way with the CIA's capacity to run larger covert operations they gave it to the CIA and and then Kennedy kept after him and and he concluded in 1962 towards the end of 62 that the CIA couldn't wouldn't do it they just wouldn't do it Colby who I interviewed extensively just didn't believe that these sorts of things could affect North Vietnam and and he threw in a towel and and so Kennedy decided in 62 to take it away from the CIA and give it to the military then it's and what's very interesting is that that many think God knows is this kind of lore that Kennedy burned by the Bay of Pigs learned his lesson it's not true at all it's not true at all the Bay of Pigs in no way slowed him down in terms of his enthusiasm for for covert operations and and and not just in North Vietnam against North Vietnam but of course against Cuba itself and what we know now about the two Kennedy's and Cuba makes clear that on Cuba he didn't back off Bay of Pigs and didn't affect him and it's certainly the case in in against North Vietnam that in no way did he he back off on pushing for the covert war I'm he believed in this for reasons that that aren't always clear he believed in it now the Kennedy White House interestingly believed that the Pentagon was was up to the task that since

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was was up to the task that since special forces were being built up they remember Special Forces had two missions and one one was unconventional warfare as it was called which meant these kinds of subversive operations on Kennedy believed that the Pentagon was up to the task that the military was building up Special Forces and they had the skills necessary to intensify and run covert operations against North Vietnam the fact is that it wasn't quite that simple in certain areas it's the military was ready but in a number of more esoteric areas that included PSYWAR and running agents and deception operations they were not and and so there was some flawed reasoning and reasoning on the part of the Kennedy administration thinking that that this could happen quickly overnight now while while eager to use covert action these Washington policymakers evidence little understanding of the intricacies involved in doing so that's not a new story for some of the people in this audience but but in fact it was the case here that they believed that you could get this started quickly you know there were all these special forces that were being built up give it to them get started and put hanaway on the ropes and and of course they were wrong about that not so easy to do these things takes time but but also for SOG it ain't it took learning and they had to learn on the job they didn't have the expertise in esoteric areas and it was costly in some some aspects of it that I'll mention in a little bit the senior leadership of the Kennedy administration

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leadership of the Kennedy administration charged the Pentagon with the task of intensifying the covert war inside North Vietnam but it's not something that the Pentagon wanted to step up to I mean it's very interesting how and and I can elaborate on this if someone's interested how the the mainstream box Deadland adds Lansdale out of the picture he was the one who became special special advisor to Secretary of Defense and Special Operations and how the Pentagon created something that looked like it was supposed to be the advocate for special operations but turned out to be just the opposite this was called the Saxa the office of a special assistant for counterinsurgency and special Activities special activities would be

SOG so the Pentagon and I'll say more about this resistant now what's very interesting is the difference between Kennedy and Johnson and you see it in the title in the in the in the book I refer to it as Ken the eagerness and Johnson trepidation and Johnson when in nineteen it took a year to write the operational plan for SOG and in part of had to do with with foot dragging on the part of the mainstream in the Pentagon that didn't want the military to take this over so it takes a year to write this plan but but by November they had it done and the plan if you look at it it had all the tricks in the bag it was it was an enthusiastic set of operations that were proposed and it was given to Johnson & Johnson initially Johnson thought well

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Johnson initially Johnson thought well if Kennedy can do it I can do it too he wasn't going to be any less tough than Kennedy but the closer he looked at that operational plan and started to think about the 1964 election he he backed off and and so what he did was he set up a committee interagency committee headed by brute crew lack who was his special assistant and he gave cruel act marching orders he said I want you to take and pick only those operations that have least risk and what they did was literally cut the plan in half and they took the least risk approach and and they also started to to concentrate on on constraints on constraints and one of the the most interesting stories about SOG is the way it was micro managed every operation had to be cleared through a chain of command that ran into the White House and and and that oversight process was one that that set a frame of reference and and that frame of reference was avoid risk limit operations and and and in fact by Johnson by setting this in nineteen at the end of 63 and making that decision to limit the SOG what it did wasn't played right into the hands of the bureaucracy that that didn't like this idea the State Department didn't like it the the Pentagon didn't like it and the CIA didn't like it because Laos was their war and so what what what happens is that early decision by Johnson sets the framework for SOG that

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Johnson sets the framework for SOG that makes it very difficult for them to be bold to propose bold and innovative measures because they had to go through the authorization process and that and the bold and the the risky often not always but often got washed out so in in in a very real sense the the oversight process in the interagency process was more concerned with the trouble that SOG operations could get you in if we revealed rather than the problems that could cause Hanoi if you exercise them with vigor I mean it's an interesting contrast now SOGs record against Hanoi was mixed it had it had its share of successes although it didn't have a very good way of determining and measuring success which was one of its real weaknesses but but SOG accomplishments were there and and I believe and I argue in the book that those accomplishments could have been greater had its operations not the limb not been limited and restrained by jittery Washington Washington policymakers who as I just said became more concerned with the trouble covert operations could cause if exposed rather than the problems such activities could cause annoy if executed effectively now SOG had some spectacular blunders too and probably the most famous being the complete failure of its agent operations between 1964 and 1967 actually it just continued a failure that CIA had with putting agents into North Vietnam about 500 were put in North Vietnam and by

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500 were put in North Vietnam and by 1967 it was apparent that this thing was a complete double-cross and actually the person who who figured that out pretty quickly in 1967 and I was hoping would be here today but it was General Bob Kingston who then was Lieutenant Colonel Bob Kingston and he took over the ancient operations and when he looked at it in sort of typical if you know Kingston and typical Kingston style he walked into Jack's Singh lab who was the chief of SOG at that time and he said he said sir do you have any messages you want to send to Ho Chi Minh because I have a direct channel to it and and of course Singh lob went through the roof but then they set their minds to well well is it possible to run this back against the North Vietnamese and and what came out of that was one of the most interesting deception operations that I've ever encountered with what SOG attempted to do was they found by the way it was interesting that that Hanoi seemed to think there were a lot more agents in North Vietnam than there really were or hadn't sent

maybe two times as many actually I talked to some some people who some North Vietnamese who who thought that it was four times as many and so what what this led Singh WOB and Kingston to cook up was the idea that well if they think there were more maybe we can make them think they're even more than they think there are and they created this deception program that I would characterize as fiendishly nasty but it had North Vietnamese

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nasty but it had North Vietnamese attention and and I explained in the book how it had North Vietnamese attention and I can discuss that in the Q&A now Assad operations you know they were shadowy operations deception all that but it was still war and in in in several ways SOG played real hardball they played real hard ball and they ruthlessly manipulated North Vietnamese prisoners of war as well as North Vietnamese citizens that saw teams kidnapped the indoctrinate and they indoctrinated them they had some psychological warfare dirty tricks that were I would characterize as mean stuff and then of course when the Ho Chi Minh Trail they they gave the North Vietnamese a lot of problems in the in the period 66 to 68 69 things started to change for them Hanoi by the way did not take SOG lightly it mounted a major counterintelligence effort inside its borders to track down agents and spies all available means of communication were used to warn the population of spies in their myths furthermore Hanoi enacted tough new decrees with harsher penalties including execution for anyone who got involved in counter-revolutionary activity it strengthened his coastal defenses to deal with SOG and on the Ho Chi Minh Trail it took several steps to neutralize saw reconnaissance teams now finally young and despite both Washington imposed restraints and Hanoi

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Washington imposed restraints and Hanoi countermeasures SOG had an impact and what's very interesting is that in 1968 after after the Tet Offensive when Johnson started to try to negotiate with the North Vietnamese the North Vietnamese had two demands for starting the peace for starting the peace talks and those demands were always reported as turned off the bombing and stopped other military operations against North Vietnam what the SOG documents show and get much more specific one is the fact that the North Vietnamese actually said stop the side war stop the agents stop the operation the covert operations and and that was the very interesting thing to find in in these documents so SOG was a long time ago and and the question that I want to address I have a few more minutes Bob the question I want to address is are there things we can learn from SOG from the SOG experience for the future and and I think there is a great deal to learn from Mack V SOG about the capacity of the US government to execute large and more complex covert operations the SOG experienced a number of obstacles and and complications that limited its effectiveness playing by Hanoi schools proved harder to do than anticipated but I would propose that the obstructions that plagued SOGs efforts are not an aberration unique to the Vietnam case but just the opposite they can be found in other Cold War examples where the u.s. sought to employ covert action and

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u.s. sought to employ covert action and furthermore these limitations are likely to affect the capacity to the White House to use this instrument of statecraft in the future an evaluation of the post-world War two history of American covert operations I think reveals and would reveal if we could do even more case studies the following recurring barriers to effective use of this instrument one while being drawn to the use of covert action in the hope that it will quickly resolve difficult foreign policy problems presidents have generally shown little understanding of what covert action can and cannot accomplish and have been very impatient with it and and that was true of SOG and that's been true lots of other cases second presidents have also worried about employing clandestine methods fearing the potential political fallout if the operations were exposed there's a kind of it'sif Renia here on the one hand Richard Helms who I interviewed I said to him I was talking about the Kennedys and then he said not just them is that all of these presidents would come to me or their advisers and say you know I want to do this covertly and so we go write a plan and then we'd show up to

them and they'd look at the plan and they go you want to do what and and and that's some that's an interesting thing that I found in spades in the in the SOG case that there there there questions about about how far to go and the part of presidents and their advisors they're also important moral dilemmas here I mean look some of the things that saw did these were really tough hardball measures and they raised a lot of

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measures and they raised a lot of questions in the bureaucracy specific I'll give it a specific cases in the Q & A of where SOG wanted to do something and the State Department throws up its hands no no no this is this is morally and ethically wrong and so that's the big issue that we have to struggle with because there may be cases where not a general principle general reasoning but but specific cases where you you sometimes have to do tough things the third general lesson the effective use of covert action as an instrument of policy proved to be a persistent challenge presidents and their advisors were inept at coordinating and integrating covert action into larger strategies I didn't say much about that tonight but in the book I go into it in great detail about how SOG at the campaign level at the operational level I think eventually did okay but but the integration of SOG into a larger strategic a larger strategy was not there SOG was looked at as in ciliary not complementary and and and I would propose that not much has changed through the Cold War on that fourth organizing and manipulating and managing complex covert programs has also been hard for the United States because in because it involves integrating a variety of different covert tactics and in the case of SOG that was an interesting thing it was very compartmented so getting the compartments together and cordon every coordinating everything and then come easily when they got to it by 68 but it took four years so this is an enduring problem fifth when more than one

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problem fifth when more than one government agency is involved in covert operations the organizational and managerial challenges multiply and the CIA military interaction in SOG is hardly one that we would characterize as close cooperation six employing different covert action techniques especially against hard targets as presented the the United States with persistent operational level challenges and sometimes were was too easy to give up on that and and there was some evidence that the SOG experienced as well so I think that many of the revelations about SOG that I I talked about it was illustrate these points and when we contrast SOG with other covert actions we know about we see some of the same constraints that hindered SOG these impediments appear endemic to the use of covert action by the United States now the final question that I would raise is should we care I mean the Cold War is over we're in a new scent we're entering a new century indeed a a new millennium and and and do we need covert operations and do we need the kinds of measures that SOG carried out the story of SOG reveals that an array of covert measures were readily available although constraint is the post-cold war world creating situations in which these methods may need to counter new threats and I think we need

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counter new threats and I think we need to have a discussion and debate about that I mean put differently can we identify both state and non-state actors who richly deserve to be the recipients of the different kinds of covert special operations that saw directed against Hanoi now that's an extreme statement but we do need I think to take a look at the kinds of asymmetrical threats that the u.s. will face in the future especially in the non-state actor realm and then start to think about well what were the kinds of techniques that SOG used how does technology how does information warfare and and and other developments allow us to use this instrument and and should we use it are there cases where we should use it we need to have a debate about that in the discussion about that not just tonight but in the policy arena so with that why don't I stop just a couple of ground rules for our Q&A unlike many of the discussions and the hallowed halls of ndu this one is on the record the working press is here which brings me to my second point you will find a CNN sony sharper with a device effectively known as a shotgun or microphone if you do have a question please raise your hand and give them a chance to to get the microphone to you and identify yourself and your affiliation

we appreciate it and try to keep your questions as brief as possible we have about half an hour Colonel Collins if you were God what would you recommend to improve the prospects for covered operations in the United States well I think that the thing that I would recommend is that that John we really need to to have a good debate and

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need to to have a good debate and discussion and and lay out why these techniques may well be necessary we're in policy community we need that discussion and and we need to infuse in that discussion that while on the one hand we are democracy and we have a set of values that we adhere to but it does not mean that we should completely hamstringing ourself especially against some of the asymmetrical and non-state actor threats that we face and and and I fortunately we don't we just don't have those sorts of discussions it it ends up as soon as you start to talk about some of the things that SOG do it's a gas and oh my goodness and even I mean on this book when I look at that some of the stories that are being written about it now in the media I mean they go to you know the things that were tough and and mean and that's what they accentuate um I wrote this book not simply to tell the story of of saag and the tough measures that are used but to raise questions and I try to raise them in the in the epilogue about how these endemic limitations and I use the word endemic and I mean endemic have have constrained our use of this instrument and we have to think about using this instrument in against some of these more asymmetrical threats so that that that I I think a democracy sometimes has to have some teeth now it doesn't mean that we should willy-nilly do this but but

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we should willy-nilly do this but but there has to be somewhere in between and we just don't seem to be able to get there please lieutenant Carl Meyer I guess student your presentation seemed to to use the same kind of argument that we hear so many times which is that then a military instrument could have been successful in Vietnam which is not necessarily a true statement whether it was a special operations instrument or whatever the other instruments that we is how how do you look how does the Special Operations community look forward and look at the the kind of threats that we face and look at the kind of situations that we're going into and say well it's not necessarily the case that a military instrument is that the kind of instrument that we need to use how is the Special Operations community going to react to that let me let me address this in the SOG case you know I have a half hour here to talk so I can't hit on some of the themes that I'd like to but very interest in the book I tried to make it absolutely clear that SOG wasn't going to win the war and and and the two centers of gravity or strategic pressure points the SOG focus on that wasn't the beginning in the end of the the enemy's strategic pressure points those were just two but they were an interesting two and and and focusing on them I believe started to throw North Vietnam a bit off balance now that has to be thought about within the context of you know a much more integrated political military economic strategy and I discussed that in the book I don't go into great lengths about what that

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into great lengths about what that should look like because I wasn't the subject but but there's no question that that Special Operations has to be part of a larger strategy now I I do introduce that theme by going back to general Wild Bill Donovan of the Wild Bill Donovan ran something like SOG in World War two is called OSS but Bill Donovan sat down a bedrock principle and he said that OSS operations had to be integrated with support and be part of the larger effort and that's the way we have to think about SOG and that's the way we have to think about special operations in the context of today's world um it's not a cure-all for everything and and I would never propose that it is or could be however it does do some things that might be useful as part of a sort of a larger approach to let's say dealing with Iraq or dealing with Osama bin Laden or we could think of some other possibilities but but you you think about it within I always think about it within a Donovan framework and I apply it not just the wartime but peacetime yes talk about how Colby and the CIA were aware that these teams were not working and tried to convince DoD and other powers would be that

that was the case but as you know there was much to comment on this sort of scrums II there were 26 teams with CIA sinan a 16 of them went in between April and December of 1963 which is precisely at the time when Colby's Far East even supposedly is telling everybody that they're done

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telling everybody that they're done working secondly of those 16 teams um well why did Colby do it I mean it's a good question given that he didn't believe in it it's a my answer would be this that while Colby didn't believe in it there was a lot of pressure on CIA to to to deliver and so they put teams in maybe it was cynical but they did it there also in some of the documents in daily especially I don't know if you read that you got the 500 page history of thug but in there what you see is that that while CIA didn't believe in it there there was there some evidence and I didn't go too far with this because I just had some shreds that they they they they didn't want to give it up to the military even though they didn't believe in it and and in fact of course they chafed at the idea that the military would take over a covert operation and they would work for the military which Kennedy had set down and in that in National Security action memorandum 57 so it's a I don't know if my answer is satisfactory but but that's how I see why you you had CIA continued to put those teams in even though Colby said and I imagine you talked to him about this and and others have said that they just didn't believe that you could affect denied areas over what had been a four year program no I think I think yeah I think there's something to they're just trying to put them in to show DoD up um could be but he didn't

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show DoD up um could be but he didn't believe in that it was gonna have any effect yeah well he it's it's that's I tried to Chronicle with this in the book but it's it's the view of denied areas that you can see that he was willing anyway to concede denied areas I've just I've I'm with the defense of prisoner of war missing-in-action office I first learned about these operations in 1982 when commando came out with the story that we had to investigate and at that time I got access to a fairly large about to file drawers full of material up in j5 in my memory of some of those documents is that they explained why CIA continued those operations despite their misgivings they did so explicitly under duress is not the right word well they did so against their better judgment and with the understanding that at the end of this next cycle of insertions if there was no better results than in the earlier phase that they would refuse to continue it and no deal and I've discussed this before unfortunately when I went back for those documents a couple of years later on another research matter I couldn't get access to them again and I've never been able to find them since so take what I've said for what it's worth no III think that one of the things what we have to recognize is the extent to which this covert operation was important to the White House and and I can't stress that enough that the White House wanted this done and the fact that that the CIA wasn't moving

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fact that that the CIA wasn't moving fast enough is in the documents I have and their dissatisfaction with this is there and and in fact you know when they decide to take it away from the CIA and give it to the military and and then resistance comes from the mainstream its McNamara who is the action officer for pushing the Pentagon to take this over now it's interesting because in the Pentagon what the Pentagon did was they created the Saxa and as I mentioned with the exhibit with the the purpose of keeping things like covert operations on a short leash and under tight control but they presented it to to the administration as we're getting on board for this so it was interesting to see how that that unfolded but when when Maxwell Taylor tried to pass the the operation back to CIN suggested that it should go back to CIA McNamara cut it off so you can see McNamara's involvement in this McNamara when I interviewed him he said I don't remember any of that so I you know I read him some documents and he said he said well you know I I didn't believe in any of it but I did it I all I know is that in the documents he comes across as being he doesn't come across as being a potted plant on this question I haven't read your book so I'm probably missing something but from your presentation I get the impression that this was an organization that was more interesting than significant so assuming I'm wrong you convinced me otherwise using this

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you convinced me otherwise using this very specific and explicit terms to show me the strategic and operational impact of this organ no no but it's what North Vietnam was doing internally the measures that they were taking to counter what they perceived to be a growing subversion problem and and I've got that in the book and that includes internal party discussions it includes what they were communicating to their population and the kind of training that they were giving to local security cadre I mean so those are the and the Ho Chi Minh Trail there they went to great lengths to counter the reconnaissance operations and that included both active and passive defense measures what I would propose is that that SOG by 1968 was beginning to have the effect the Kennedy desired in 60 one but they had just gotten to that point now why did they just get to that point for some of the things I said or earlier that they you know they they had to learn on the job I mean first of all you know they were when the when saw stood up it was there was no organization in being they had to create this from the ground up while the White House was saying give me the results give me the results so it took a while for them to figure it out and and to gain some expertise and some areas they didn't have but but my view would be that 68 they they they started to cross that threshold and it was just at that point that at least against North Vietnam Johnson shut it down now most of it now against the Ho Chi Minh Trail what the story really is one of early

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what the story really is one of early success because they caught the North Vietnamese off-guard the North Vietnamese taking the measures necessary to to counter that and then saw being able to you know it's it's it's point/counterpoint saw then being able unable to diversify and change what they wanted to do in part because of the kinds of constraints that were placed on where they could go and what they could do and and so on so I mean I don't want to give the impression that that saw had strategic impact what I'm saying is that SOG could have affected and was beginning to have an effect on these two centers of gravity so I want to be very precise when that point night and in the book I'm probably at nauseam precise on that point yes what is your understanding of a relationship we decide and even the white operation which is the technological effort based in accompaniment so on to open up the trail get information about the travelers took a long time to develop yeah which kind of relates to their ability to be effective they of course they they were a consumer but but they also in you know in putting the sensors and stuff and they actually hump some of that stuff in and and put it in place now the extent to which that contributed to their targeting was not in at least in the documents it isn't clear to me that that the take from that was then integrated into the the targeting that saw conducted in fact a lot of times saw teams were put into an area to to see

[00:56:03 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVFMR8T9jVg&t=3363s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVFMR8T9jVg&t=3363s)

teams were put into an area to to see what they could see and the idea was originally that they would stay out there five or six days be quiet you know hang out and and and and and look for targets now what happens is that that becomes increasingly difficult to do staying for example staying for five or six days in 1969 not likely but it's it's unclear to me the extent to which the take from that that data was fed into saw I know that it was fed into the bombing but the bombing the the kind of bombing that SOG generated was tactical air strikes not that heavy heavy bombing that the b-52s carried out I mean I think I'm right on that but but Scotty maybe you can tell me if I'm missing something here yes the future when stock was going in we were only less than 20 years away from World War two give or take a few years and the policy works that you referred to had had experience both in combat and certainly in seeing movies of Donovan's exploits with OSS santomero and a variety of others greatly glorified guerilla operations in Special Operations what do you think the impact of the reaction of the Congress to these secret stuff that was done which caused executive orders limiting military intelligence and so forth and the fact that fewer and fewer of the congressional members and the policy Long's have had any of those types of experience is going to have on anybody's desire to conduct special operations in the future well I think it's gonna make

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the future well I think it's gonna make it increasingly difficult I mean my short answer would be that we're going to see in spades what Helms told me you're going to want to do what that that I think is is the the end result of it because what what influences of these individuals is all of this sort of the stories of things that went wrong and and of course important ethical moral questions that we need to address so my answer would be that that the kinds of limitations and constraints that SOG had placed on it are multiplied by adding Congress to the to the mix of things although I mean it doesn't necessarily mean that there can't be more thoughtful approach but I think it goes back to what I tried to say too and answering John Collins question and that is we need to to have a much more serious and and thoughtful discussion about what Special Operations can and cannot do and and how much risk you're willing to take and and whether you're willing to to take risks and I know for example I mean without sort of telling a tale out of school I can remember when I was at at Fort Bragg and I was giving a briefing on my research and and I was talking about you know the the problem there's some of these problems in the saw context and some of the officers that were part of the

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the officers that were part of the briefing said to me we had that set of problems about a month ago when some things we we aren't going to tell you about but but that's a that's a continuing issue for us observations about the differences between the era that you're talking about and after all Armed Services the control Appropriations for the agency as well as defense committees control appropriations for DoD and the agency has compared to the president here where you have a different set of committees and the impact of that on the ability to conduct these kinds of things well the Appropriations I think is is one aspect of it the other aspect of it is the finding process and and the extent to which in the findings for conducting covert operations and especially in the last let's say 15 well 20 years where we've been so polarized between the the Congress and the presidency that um it it makes it difficult I mean very difficult to do these things in the oversight process isn't just a budget I mean the budget issue comes into play for sure and you can see that in some of the the operations of the 80s and I think especially in the the Contras all they're not of the afghan situation so it's not that there are places where the executive and the Congress can come together to use secret operations but um it's difficult and in the budget process allows for for micromanagement and in the case of them if we look at the Contra example of real micromanagement of what you can do and not do so um you

[01:02:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVFMR8T9jVg&t=3720s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVFMR8T9jVg&t=3720s)

of what you can do and not do so um you know our process and I'm a believer and I mean I believe that the oversight process is important and and I think that Congress can play a very important role in in not just saying what's what's wrong but also looking at this and and in supporting measures where they can contribute to achieving secured national security objectives but I mean it's a dogfight and you probably know that better than I do look at the transcripts of those 60 interviews or they yeah they're all Fort Bragg I mean I put the whole collection of Fort Bragg and and you can get them there in the they're there yes both the Soviets Koreans are discussing here in its predecessor in the second world war took place within the context of war and that's someone coming interfere even then they appear to be more interesting than significant what is the implication as you see that there is any relevance to that experience the present situation well I think there is relevance and I I don't suicide on't think that we're going to conduct a full-blown saw no but I do think that many of the different techniques and measures that SOG used are measures that you may want in your quiver in in the future for example let's suppose one let's suppose that that one of the things that you might want to do against a rogue state is to is to create some suspicion and deception among the the inner circle well SOG had a variety of techniques for for trying to do that and today we may even have more because of information warfare and saga saga conducted

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warfare and saga saga conducted clandestine and covert sabotage operations and there may be some place for that so it's not I don't want to propose that that in total we we would have any I can't see anything on the horizon where that would be the case but but in terms of the different instruments that saag employed those

may be instruments that in fact we ought to give consideration and for to and so in looking at how saag used those we can learn from that what worked what didn't constraints good bad and so on does it come up in the book at all you ever entertain the idea that in a democracy with a constitution we haven't bothered to clear Washington's 1941 that there are hazards of democracy that comes up before the conversation so far so here talking to public saw type operations in the atmosphere that we're dealing with not Road States it was lobby of gross State what's the approval mechanism for these types of songs I mean we have an approval mechanism and it's called the finding process and it goes from the President to the Congress to the committee's and in the committee's make judgments about this so I mean I don't see this is outside the democratic process now I think we need to have in the democratic process a discussion of should we or shouldn't we and if we

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should we or shouldn't we and if we should to what extent and not but when it gets down to if let's suppose I on that then we make the decision all right we we need to be able to do some of this in the shadows and that's a conclusion that there's some kind of consensus on we have to we have to look at it in a reasoned way but but often I mean the debate over covert operations is not reason it's it tends to be either under no circumstances or yeah some some on the other side who think that that there should be no constraints we've got to be more thoughtful in that exercise thank you dick before I ask you to join me in thanking dick once more let me make two comments one as I mentioned earlier the these events a sort of extension of what goes on in the pages of joint force quarterly will be bringing out a review of this book shortly in jfq and also through the cooperation of Collins dicks publisher will be taking a chapter on military strategy and SOG and producing it as a feature article in a forthcoming issue of jfq and secondly I want to announce that the next event in this series will take place on Thursday evening January 20th when the book on parade will be Korea on the brink from the 1212 incident to the Kwangju uprising 1979-1980 by General John Wickham former chief of staff of the army and commander-in-chief United Nations command and combined forces command in Korea at the time of the events after the assassination of president Park that led to the tragedy and in the suppression of demonstrations in Guangzhou it's a case study and a sink under fire in a bunker without much communication with his ally and it's a very fascinating study that book will be published by nd you press here later

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published by nd you press here later this month and be available to the students and faculty probably to look at before the event dick thanks very much for coming down from from up north tonight and safe trip back to Fletcher and I urge those who have looked at the book do because it's a it's a very interesting highlight on the Vietnam War which has been largely overlooked and as I can attest from spending two years at Fort Bragg during this period something which I didn't even learn very much about at the club after happy hour thanks a lot richard schultz teaches international politics at tufts university and has written several books including a future of airpower and soviet union and revolutionary warfare HarperCollins publishes this book the secret war

END